



# SUPPORTIVE CLOTHING WOMEN'S RUGBY



Participation rates in women's rugby are rising year on year, and with it, an increased focus on injuries specific to female players. While it is important to understand all the different types of injuries we see in rugby, one area that is often overlooked is breast injuries. Breasts are mainly made of fat and glandular tissue which are held in place by the skin covering them and ligaments. Due to the lack of muscular protection, breasts can be vulnerable to injury, particularly from direct blows during contact sports. In fact, almost 60% of women participating in contact sports report sustaining a breast injury, however many athletes do not report breast injuries or seek treatment.

## There are two main types of breast injuries

### Impact

- Acute trauma injuries
- Contact/direct impact

### Movement

- Chronic injuries
- Running/jumping



*Impact injuries are commonly seen in contact sports, and in athletes with larger breasts or higher body mass index. While movement-related injuries can occur during running or jumping activities.*

## In rugby, we can see breast injuries due to:

- Direct contact (with another player / ball / ground)
- Grappling
- Compression / squashing
- Running
- Jumping

## IS BREAST INJURY / PAIN PREVENTABLE?

Breast injuries are like any other soft tissue injuries and can lead to contusions / haematomas (bruises), oedema (swelling) and pain. In some cases, scar tissue can form or the fatty breast tissue can die (necrosis) which may be evident on a breast exam, like a mammogram. It is important if you are playing rugby and sustain a breast injury that you seek advice from a healthcare professional. And even if undergoing a routine breast exam, you should advise the healthcare professional that you are involved in a contact sport and of any previous breast injuries. Like any other soft tissue injury, breast injuries can be treated, so by reporting breast injuries to a medical professional the risk of recurrence or exacerbation can be reduced.

One of the simplest ways to try minimise the risk of breast injury is wearing a well-fitting supportive bra. However, the vast majority of women are not wearing the correct size or fit for their body shape or for their sport. Ill-fitting or inappropriate sports bras not only could lead to an injury but can also affect your performance. With so many different options and styles out there, it can be hard to know what is right for you. There are different bras for different needs and activities, no one size fits all!

# WHY SHOULD I WEAR A SPORTS BRA WHILE PLAYING RUGBY?

## Improve posture and performance

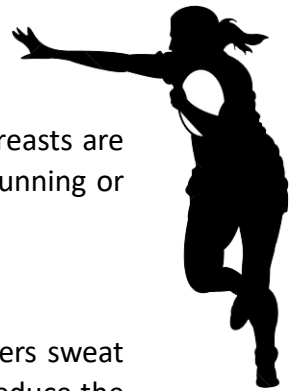
- Breasts can be heavy and this can impact your posture. In turn this could negatively affect your performance and lead to pain or injury.

## Minimise breast movement

- While running and jumping, bare breasts can move up and down as much as 15cm, as breasts are primarily supported only by the skin covering them. Excessive breast movement during running or jumping can lead to breast discomfort.

## Protection

- Breast bruising and chafing can be minimised with a good supportive sports bra that offers sweat management, support and comfort. In rugby, a sports bra with breast padding may help reduce the risk of impact or contact injuries.



# HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TYPE OF SUPPORT I NEED?

**Age:** The elasticity of the skin that supports the breasts decreases with age and subsequently reduces the amount of support it provides to the breasts. Older women and women after pregnancy require greater support from their sports bras.

**Exercise type:** Breast movement can lead to pain and injury, and the amount of breast movement can depend on the type of sport or activity you are doing. Sports involving running and jumping will cause more breast movement and require greater breast support.

*Remember, your bra size can change regularly as you grow and move through different life stages. Where possible, you should regularly try and seek professional advice in sizing and fitting to ensure you get the right fit for you and to minimise the risk of injury, discomfort and soreness.*

**Bra size:** Larger breasts are heavier breasts and therefore require greater support from a sports bra.

# WHAT DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRAS ARE THERE?

**Compression bra** – Flattens breasts against the body and the breasts will move as one against the chest wall. This bra type provides stretch and support, giving you a secure feel with minimal bounce while you are exercising or moving. Compression bras usually have moulded cups and a seamless design aimed at support and comfort.



**Encapsulation bra** – Has separate cups and supports each breast separately, meaning breasts can move independently. This individual support generally results in less breast movement. Encapsulation bras usually have straps that can be adjusted to provide appropriate support to each breast.

**Combination bra** – Compresses the breasts against the body like the compression bra, but also supports each breast separately like the encapsulation bra. This bra combines the benefits of both compression and encapsulation bras to ensure support and comfort.



# HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT BRA?

## Band

- Should be made of strong, wide elastic material so it can support your breasts without moving. If you have larger breasts you should go for a wider band.

## Straps

- Should be wide and padded for comfort. If you are wearing the right size, the straps should not dig into your shoulders or slide off your shoulders.

## Cup

- Your breasts should be completely covered or encased in the cups to limit breast movement during sport. In rugby semi-rigid cups are permitted to cover the soft breast tissue.

## Underwire

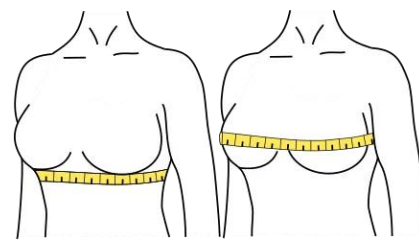
- If you choose a sports bra with an underwire, it must fit the shape of your breasts correctly, otherwise choose a soft-cup (non-underwire) bra instead.

## Front band

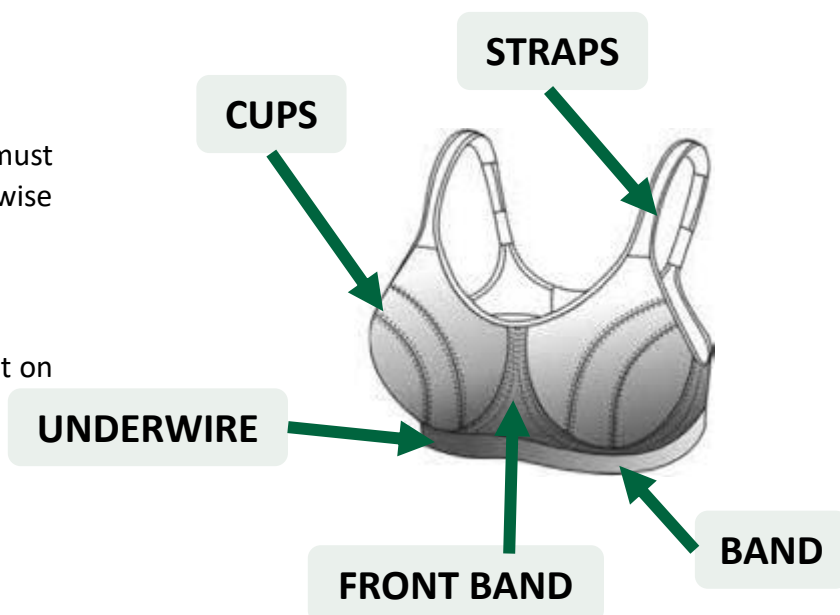
- The centre of the bra between the cups should sit on your breast bone, not on your breasts.

## Material

- Should control sweat and not irritate your skin.



*Try making sure the band fits well first, then adjust the straps to fit comfortably. After that, you should ensure the cup fits your breast shape correctly, if not then try a different style or brand and start again with the band fit first.*



# WHAT IS BREAST PADDING?



Breast padding can help reduce impacts to the breast and therefore reduce the risk of breast injury in rugby. Breast padding does not replace the need for a sports bra, as does not always provide adequate support for the breast. Players should wear a sports bra underneath any breast padding. Regulations from World Rugby allows for padding that covers soft breast tissue, under the arm or integrated shoulder. It should also never restrict normal playing movement.

## BREAST PADDING SHOULD:

Be smooth with rounded edges

Be comfortable and work with your sports bra

Be World Rugby approved

Have no hard ridges inside or outside

Visit [World Rugby](https://www.worldrugby.org) for more information on padded/supportive clothing specifications in rugby.